

[Readings: Mal. 3:19-20a; Psalm 98; 2 Thess. 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19]

It's coming. The end of time. The apocalypse. Judgment Day. That's what our readings point to. Actually, quite soberly, the readings point to the day and the moment when we breathe our last breath. Should we dread it? Should we be fearful? Should we be annoyed? Or should we be overjoyed?

The answer to THAT question is easy. It depends on how deep your faith is. It depends on your relationship with Jesus Christ. It depends on your status with the Church. How you are in these three departments will govern your reaction to the reality of the end of our personal time on earth. As the expression goes, are you ready to "meet your Maker?"

To the disciples of Jesus, the Temple of Jerusalem was bedrock. Nothing could bring down these walls. The smallest stones in the structure weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of them weighed 50 tons. The largest existing stone is 12 yards in length and 3 yards high and it weighed hundreds of tons! The stones were so immense that neither mortar nor any other binding material was used between the stones. Their stability was attained by the great weight of the stones. The walls towered over Jerusalem, over 400 feet in one area. Inside the four walls was 45 acres of bedrock which were shaved flat, and during Jesus' day a quarter of a million people could fit comfortably within the structure.

By comparison, the walls of this church go up only about 35 feet, and the buildings that make up our parish plant – the church, the

parish center and the rectory, sit only on 10 acres, versus 45 acres for the Temple of Jerusalem.

You can then understand the disciple's surprise. They want to hear more.

Jesus' prediction that a structure so immense would be leveled to the ground seemed impossible. But they pressed Jesus for more information.

In their voice was fear. Fear that their lives were about to change forever. Jesus had not made any predictions like this one. This was different. This, they could understand. Forty years later Jesus' prediction came true. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by Rome. Of course, it wasn't much of a stretch for Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke probably was written ten years AFTER the Temple was destroyed! Still, what are we to learn from this prediction and its fulfillment?

The Bedrock of Faith is not in temples. The Bedrock of Faith is not in signs. The Bedrock of Faith is in Christ alone.

How do we live with this knowledge? Some grow cynical about the humanity of the human race. Others succumb to depression, anxiety, or a life circumscribed by fear. We can give up, give in, or behave like the Thessalonians: party hearty today, for tomorrow we die!

Even prophets like Malachi who envision the day of the Lord as a severe hour of reckoning don't throw in the towel on history altogether. After their return from exile and the rebuilding of the Temple, the Israelites have become lukewarm in their faith. Their animal sacrifices in the temple were animals that were imperfect,

stolen or diseased. Their financial offerings were meager. Malachi gives them a wake-up call to conversion or else! There is a ray of hope for those who repent, change their lifestyles and live faithfully for the rest of their lives.

Jesus says that the day will come when not one stone of the temple will be left mortared to another, because it will all be torn down. He's reminding us that everything here on earth is temporary.

Goodness will last forever and badness has an expiration date tied to this world. What continues to motivate us in the face of the darkest seasons is the brilliant light of justice always on the horizon. The only way to get there is to go there. This is no time to give in to the gloom brought on by corrupt leaders – whoever they are -- and destructive decisions. Justice waits on our courage to take the journey toward its “healing rays.”

The presence of evil, Jesus says, leads to our giving testimony: When bad things happen, we're required to raise our voices. We're called to answer the lies of our generation with truth. We confront villainy with values. We say no to fear, and yes to courage.

So... How deep is your faith? Describe a time in your life that felt apocalyptic: destructive, chaotic, transforming, final. What had to be surrendered, and what came to life through that experience?

What is your relationship with Jesus Christ? What is your status with the Church? Will we greet His return with fear or with joy?

Apocalypses begin and end in the heart of each believer. The journey toward divine revelation is an interior trek. The dark night of the soul is nothing less than the battle of the good and evil within us. We try to be loving people; honest in our business dealings and

service to the community; faithful to our friends and family; prayerful and thankful to God for the goodness and mercy we receive each day. But even with the most rigorous spiritual discipline, we cannot avoid the fight for our soul. And as Jesus advises us, we cannot prepare our testimony in advance, because we have no way to know when the battle will begin or what will trigger it.

Make no mistake though, at some point you will find yourself fighting the good fight against apathy, anger, doubt, pride, resentment, or greed. You will feel unhappy, unappreciated, and unloved. It will be a hellish time, but don't despair. On the other side of your trials awaits a loving God Who will welcome you, embrace you, and reward you for your faithfulness. AMEN!